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LETTERS FROM A TEACHER TO HER YOUNG FEMALE FRIEND, JUST
ABOUT COMMENCING TO KEEP SCHOOL.

No. XII.

My dear L— : The head waters of the Mississippi rise so near to those of the St. Lawrence, that it seems a more natural course to survey that basin next, leaving, for the present, the comparatively smaller ones of the Atlantic slope.

“The great basin of the Mississippi is only a part of a much more extensive depression, called the *Great Central Valley of North America*, which has its oceanic termination, south on the Gulf of Mexico, and north in Hudson’s Bay. It is limited east and west by table lands, and not by the actual chains of the Appalachian or Rocky Mountains. Towards the northern boundary of this great valley, the actual separation of the sources of the northern and southern basins is in many places undefined by nature, and the summit level so completely a part of the surface of a sphere, that the waters flow both ways.” The sources of the Mississippi and the St. Lawrence actually mingle their waters, when swollen by freshets.

The length of the Mississippi River proper is 1265 miles. The particular valley of the Mississippi proper, (which is above the junction of the Ohio,) covers an area of 180,000 square miles; but the whole basin, including the valleys of all the tributaries, occupies 1,099,000 square miles. The Ohio valley contains 196,000, and is an inclined plane, sloping towards Lake Michigan and the Illinois River, which plane the Ohio traverses obliquely, receiving its southern branches through deep chasms rather than valleys.

The Missouri valley contains 530,000 square miles, which are drained by its thousand streams. This valley comprises not only the area above its junction with the Mississippi, but the valleys of the Osage, Kansas, Platte Rivers, &c. The Missouri flows 1870 miles in a direct course, but 3000 by the windings of the stream. Its waters are turbid. It is bordered by immense prairies, and the lands around its higher sources can only be compared to the steppes of Central Asia in desolation, and to the coldest part of Siberia in climate. These remote sources are, at their highest elevation, among mountain ridges, 10,000 feet above the Atlantic level; but the table land, from which most of them flow, is 5000 feet high; and this, rejecting the highest peaks and elevations, gives a variation of 18 degrees of temperature between their sources and their junction with the Mississippi. After

the Missouri passes the gates of the Rocky Mountains,—where it flows 18 miles through rocky barriers, and for 5 miles through a chasm, where the rocks rise from 1000 to 1200 feet perpendicular height, with but one spot between the water and the precipice where a man can stand,—no cataract disturbs its navigation. Great mineral treasures abound on its mountain streams, compensating, in some measure, for the want of vegetable luxuriance,—a great portion of the country beyond the prairies being dry and sterile.

The lower valley of the Mississippi, including White, Arkansas, and Red River valleys, occupies 200,000 square miles. The Arkansas and Red Rivers flow from an elevation of 5000 feet. The Arkansas is 2000 miles in actual length, 1000 in a direct line; the Red, 1000, and 800 in a direct line. The Arkansas is navigable 600 miles from its mouth, but, above that distance, is much impeded by shoals and cataracts. The climate at its head is as cold as that of Labrador. The waters of these two rivers are brackish, from the saline particles with which they are impregnated.

The contrast between the basins of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi is a very striking one in many respects. The waters of the former flow through innumerable lakes of immense extent, and are beautifully clear and limpid; the Mississippi passes through no lakes of any note, and its waters are often turbid even to muddiness; for large quantities of soil are brought into it by the force of the mountain streams, which, in their passages, tear away and bring down the very substance of the hills. The Mississippi annually swells, and often overleaps its bed; while a rise of three feet in the St. Lawrence, once or twice in fifty years, is considered a great event in its history. Yet the many streams that flow into its lakes must swell the volume of their waters to a great amount, equal, perhaps, to that which makes the Mississippi burst its bounds; but, being equally diffused over the immense aggregate of surface which the lakes contain, they are apparently lost. The St. Lawrence rises and empties in such high latitudes, that, although the variations of climate are great in the regions through which it flows, yet this is mainly owing to the relative heights of their different portions. It returns, at its mouth, into a region of ice and snow similar to that where its sources rise. The Mississippi, without reference to the difference of elevation from which its head waters take their rise in various directions, passes through so many degrees of latitude, that it presents many striking contrasts of climate and scenery. Yet its mouth, like its source near the table land of the north, is low and marshy. The banks of the St. Lawrence slope from lofty heights to the surface of the waters, while those of the Mississippi, particularly near the mouth, present a level scarcely rising above the highest spring floods of the stream. Much of the land area of the Mississippi basin is covered with open, grassy plains, while that of the St. Lawrence is, in a state of nature, a continuous and almost impervious forest. In the area of 180,000 square miles, which is that of the Mississippi proper, no elevations occur deserving the name of hills. The bluffs which stretch from the Ohio River to Baton Rouge, and are known further to the east by the name of the *ten thousand hills*, are merely the advanced points of a low range of hills.

The Mississippi, before it empties itself into the Gulf of Mexico,

divides into a number of channels, each having its separate egress; the St. Lawrence imperceptibly expands to a wide bay, which afterwards opens into a still wider gulf, of the same name with the river. Besides that wonder of the world, the Falls of Niagara, there are many rapids which occur in the flow of the waters of the St. Lawrence to the ocean; but not one of any note obstructs the navigation of the Mississippi below the Falls of St. Anthony. The productions of the St. Lawrence basin are almost entirely of one character; at least, they are peculiar to one zone; those of the Mississippi comprise almost all known vegetable growths.

The laws which regulate the annual floods of the Mississippi, referred to in this comparison of the two basins, can only be understood by considering the relative height and position of the extreme sources, and the extent and geographical position of the different valleys composing it. The chief of these are the Ohio, Mississippi proper, Lower Mississippi, and Missouri. Other circumstances being equal, the rivers that flow from high latitudes towards the equator can never be so destructive in their inundations as those that flow towards the east or west, because the spring thaws begin near the mouth, and retrograde toward the source, thus occasioning a more gradual flow than would take place in the contrary circumstances. The floods of the Red River are the first that flow into the Mississippi. They commence as early as February and March; they are gradual, for the reason above mentioned,—their remote sources being on cold mountain heights. Those of the Arkansas, Ohio, and Mississippi proper, commence early in March, but do not attain their full height in the Delta till about the middle of June. (The Delta of the Mississippi, portions of which are annually overflowed, commences at the egress of the Atchafalaya on the right, and the Iberville on the left. North latitude 31° .) These floods nearly subside before the beginning of August, when the later melting of the sources of the Missouri, which are in still colder regions than any of those I have mentioned, complete the annual inundation.

The inhabitants of the Delta know the period of these annual floods very nearly, and in common years can calculate their arrival within a few days; but such are the variety and the inequality of the seasons throughout the immense basin from which they come, that no length of experience can give intimation of the quantity or elevation. In 1800 and 1801, the waters of the Mississippi did not reach the height of the banks above the Delta.

It is generally supposed, in connection with the annual inundation of the river, that it occasionally changes its bed; but Darby asserts this to be a mistaken opinion. "The bed of the Mississippi," he says, "like that of all other rivers, is the lowest depression of the country through which it flows. As high as the efflux of La Fourche, the stream is 130 feet deep at low water, and 75 or 80 at Natchez. The efflux of La Fourche is in the same latitude with New Orleans. At New Orleans, the stream is more than 100 feet deep. From the immediate margin of this great mass of water the country falls by a very slow depression, and the bottom of the deepest lakes, Pontchartrain, Maurepas, Quacha, Chetimaches, and others, varies from 4 or 5 to 18 or 20 feet below the general level of the Delta, leaving the bottom of the Mississippi far below that of Pontchartrain, or any other lake of Louisiana except those

formed by the sweeping bends of the river. These latter often cause the water to recurve upon itself, and thus a new channel is formed ; but the ancient bend, though assuming the aspect of a lake, still attests its origin by its proximity, great depth, and perfect resemblance to the bends of the parent stream. Of the latter species of lake, Fausse Rivière, Yazoo, and Homochitta, were formed within the range of history ; those of Concordia, St. John, St. Joseph's, Providence, and Grand Lakes, were found in their existing state when Louisiana was colonized by the French. With these exceptions the Mississippi can no more recede from its channel than could the Hudson, Delaware, or Susquehannah. The barriers which confine the latter to their channels are more prominent, but not less impenetrable, than the extended alluvion which spreads from the Mississippi River."

The tides have never been known to rise in the channel of the Mississippi, even when this channel has been lowest, as far as the city of New Orleans ; but they are perceptible near that river far higher up. This is only accounted for by the fact that the surface water of the Mississippi, when lowest, is higher than that of the lakes and rivers in its vicinity. The Delta of the Mississippi is a region of comparatively recent origin. A sweep of vision along the line of sea-coast from the Sabine, on the borders of Texas, to Pearl River, on the opposite boundary line of the State of Louisiana, takes in a marsh of more than 400 miles in extent, interrupted only by the watercourses. Approaching the line of separation between land and sea, the waves of the gulf can still, though with difficulty, be distinguished from the slightly more elevated green of the marshes. A few shrubs and clumps of trees are perceived at a distance, in solitary groups, to mark the commencement of a more majestic vegetation. Immense prairies extend beyond the marshes, ornamented by serpentine lines of forests, curving with the concealed channels. Still further inland, dense and continuous forests darken the perspective through which rolls the winding Mississippi in solemn and irresistible majesty. When this stream is at its highest elevation, the wide recesses just described are gorged to overflowing, the forests of the plains are inundated, the watercourses vanish, and a vast lake spreads before the view, 100 miles in length and from 10 to 40 in width. The very narrow alluvial borders, like the wooded lines in the prairies, decorate, without greatly diminishing, the expanse of waters. On the east, the limits of this annual inland sea are strongly defined, but on the west the line of separation between the prairies and marshes is faint and indefinite.

This survey shows the impenetrable nature of the Louisiana coast, except through the channels of the rivers. Even in these, 12 feet is the deepest water which can be depended upon, at all seasons, and even that depth only in the Mississippi. No walls of rock, however high and strong, could more completely shut out all approach than the low shores, shallow waters and marshes of Louisiana. West of the mouths of the Mississippi, the *débris* brought down by its waters are distributed in great abundance ; eastward of the Delta these fragments are not found,—which facts prove the course of the currents along the northern shores of the Gulf of Mexico, and also serve to direct the approach of vessels to the entrance of the Mississippi. The main outlet of this river, flowing down to the south-eastern corner of the Delta to Balize, is

so much deeper than any of the other outlets, even Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne, which have been thought most worthy to be improved as the principal channel of internal navigation in the Delta, that Darby asserts that the heaviest ship of war in the United States' navy could be navigated from the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans through the channel of the Mississippi at much less expense than a vessel of 10 feet draught could be made to float from the Iberville through Lakes Maurepas and Pontchartrain to the mouth of Bayou St. John. The former is practicable, the latter almost impossible, 18 feet being the deepest water found in Lake Pontchartrain.

The above account of the Delta is the substance of Darby's description of it. I will only add to this survey of the Mississippi basin, that it has been estimated that this river and its tributaries afford 20,000 miles of steam navigation.—*Murray's Encyclopædia of Geog.*

The whole coast of the Gulf of Mexico is marshy, and the Mississippi can only be considered, on true geographical principles,—these are Darby's words,—a section of that system of rivers flowing into the Gulf of Mexico. It is a remarkable fact, that if every stream, great and small, which enters this gulf from Cape Sable of Florida to Point Gorda of Yucatan, were supposed to be continued in the line of their course, they would unite with each other, in a common estuary, not far from the centre of the gulf. M.

ANNUAL ABSTRACT OF THE MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL RETURNS
FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR 1840-41.

We have the pleasure to announce that the Annual Abstract of the School Returns for the school year 1840-41 is completed, and will soon be transmitted to all the different school committees in the State. Like its predecessors, this volume contains selections from the school committees' reports.

Returns were received from three hundred and four, of the three hundred and seven, towns in the State, and reports from two hundred and ninety-nine. No return was received from Ludlow, in the county of Hampden, nor from Cheshire, or Savoy, in the county of Berkshire. No report was received from Westford, in the county of Middlesex; from Spencer, in the county of Worcester; from Ludlow, in the county of Hampden; from Cheshire, Florida, New Ashford, and Savoy, in the county of Berkshire; nor from Chilmark, in Dukes county. As the law, requiring committees to make reports to their respective towns, and to forward a copy of them for the use of the Board of Education, was passed in 1838, and has been in operation ever since, unaltered; and as its provisions have been transmitted, in one form or another, not less than six times, to the school committees of each town in the State,—a failure, in regard to making a report, and the consequent forfeiture by the town of its distributive share of the income of the State School Fund, must proceed from some other cause than a want of the means of knowledge.

The reports of the school committees were more voluminous than for either of the two preceding years; being equivalent, in the whole, to about two thousand three hundred manuscript letter-paper pages. Of the extraordinary merit of these documents, it is unnecessary to

speak. In order, however, to form a due estimate of their character, it should be remembered, that they are not the productions of a few philosophers and scholars, selected or convened, from a widely-extended and populous country, whose lives have been devoted to studying the subjects of which they treat. On the contrary, we have a State whose whole population is less than seven hundred and forty thousand, and whose whole area is but seven thousand five hundred square miles. This territory is divided into more than three hundred towns, the inhabitants of each of which elect, from their own numbers, a committee, consisting, ordinarily, of three or five persons, whose duty it is to superintend the schools, and, at the end of the official year, to report their condition to the town. These committees consist of men engaged in all the various avocations of life. It is only, therefore, after considering the limited numbers of the population and the circumscribed territories, whence the reports have emanated, that the talent by which they were prepared, the usefulness of the instruction they communicate, their enlightened forecast, and their signal elevation of moral sentiment, can be adequately appreciated.

The range of subjects discussed in the last reports is somewhat more ample and various than for either of the two preceding years. The topics occupying most space relate to the condition of schoolhouses, as it regards their construction, location, and appurtenances; the diversity of class-books; the lamentable contrast between the real value of the schools, and their value as indicated by the indifference of parents and guardians towards them; irregularity and tardiness in the attendance of the scholars; and the favorable opinions of the committees in regard to the measures now in operation to give expansion and energy to our Common School system. But, as copious selections were made, on these points, in the last two Abstracts, almost every thing pertaining to them has been omitted in the present.

On another class of subjects,—such as the benefits to be derived from a more liberal appropriation of money by the towns,—the last hundred dollars generally doing as much good as the first two or three hundred; the advantages which might be realized from a judicious classification of the scholars,—and, for the accomplishment of this purpose, the establishment of Union Schools, and the separation of the smaller and larger scholars, in all cases where practicable; the paralyzing effect of the private school system upon the paramount interest of the Public Schools; the advantages of apparatus and school libraries; the superiority of female teaching, for young children, over that of males; the value of thorough instruction, as contrasted with the worthlessness and banefulness of that which is superficial; the introduction of new modes and processes for exciting the interest of children and for communicating knowledge to them; and, above all, the power of a body of well-qualified, well-trained teachers, forthwith to lift the entire mass of the rising generation to a point in intelligence, in manners, in morals, immeasurably higher than that which they now occupy;—on this class of subjects, the reports contained admirable materials for more than double the amount of the selections which have been made from them. But the Editor of this paper, in his capacity of Secretary of the Board of Education, felt debarred from working deeper into this mine, and bringing forth more of its invaluable treasures. For, although the expense of printing the previous Abstracts has been but about a thou-

sand dollars apiece for each edition, yet it is well known that, in one branch of the Legislature, objection has been made to their size, by individuals who did not think their value an equivalent for their cost. Hence the Board deemed it advisable materially to reduce the size of the present volume, whatever might be the value of its contents. In preparing the work, therefore, it was our endeavor faithfully to conform to the wishes of the Board, in regard to the amount of the selections to be made. Yet, knowing, as we think it no arrogance to say we do,—from ample opportunities industriously improved,—the wants of the schools, on the one hand, and, on the other, the fitness of the advice and suggestions contained in the committees' reports to meet those wants, and the welcome and thankfulness with which a far more liberal selection from them would be received by all those who understand our Common School system best and appreciate it highest ;—this continual omission, in compliance with the views of the Board, of the excellent material contained in the reports, has demanded from day to day throughout the whole work, the most intrepid self-denial. In consequence of the growing knowledge and interest on this subject. (which no man who has any reputation to care for will now deny,) we believe the time is not far distant, when sordid or parsimonious considerations will cease, in all places, to be brought into competition with those great social and moral truths that concern the highest prosperity of the State ; or, if forced into competition, that the latter will infallibly triumph.

From an inspection of the Abstract, it will be seen that, in some instances, the selections are long ; in others, short ; and, in others still, that no selection has been made. To those committees from whose reports little or nothing has been taken, and to that portion of the public who do not understand the circumstances, perhaps a word of explanation may be proper.

In regard to the first class of cases,—where the selections are long,—nothing need be said ; their obvious value is their vindication. The reason for making a brief selection in some instances, and none in others, was twofold. Some of the reports discussed only the subjects of schoolhouses, school books, irregularity of attendance, &c., which belonged to the class of omitted topics. In other cases, the reports were little more than statistical ; and, of course, the substance of them may be found, in a more compact and convenient form, in the statistical tables. Again, some of the reports were very brief, containing only from ten or twelve lines to a single page, and, of course, not at all fulfilling the requisitions of the statute, whose language is, that the committees shall make a "*detailed* report of the condition of the several Public Schools, in their respective towns, designating particular improvements and defects in the methods or means of education, and stating such facts and suggestions in relation thereto, as, in their opinion, will best promote the interests and increase the usefulness of the schools." Twenty of the reports consisted of only a single page or less. Indeed, the diversity in the length of the reports was very great, as they ranged from ten lines to sixty pages. The reports from two towns,—not a single line of which would any reader be willing to spare,—were about equal, in extent, to the entire body of reports from a county containing thirty towns. Add to this, the limitation imposed by the Board, in reference to the amount of the selections to be made, and it is hoped

that a sufficient justification will be found for the differences of space allotted to the towns, in the volume.

Last year, twenty-five of the reports were printed ; this year, thirty-three,—sixteen of which were from the county of Essex. Though the reading of a report, in open town meeting, cannot be otherwise than useful, yet the advantages of distributing to every family in the town, an able and well-written Tract on Common Schools, must be indefinitely greater.

In several towns, during the last year, the committees invited the inhabitants of the respective school districts to assemble, in their school-house or other convenient place, to hear selections from the former Abstracts read, or a lecture delivered, on the *personal* and *immediate* duties of fathers, mothers, and guardians, in respect to their schools. The reports from Gardner and Phillipston, in the county of Worcester, from Canton, in the county of Norfolk, and from Freetown, in the county of Bristol, show the highly-beneficial results with which these measures were rewarded.

On this subject we wish to make a single remark. Let the respective committees ask themselves whether their own minds have not been enlightened and stimulated, whether the horizon of their own views has not been greatly enlarged, in consequence of a more attentive and thorough consideration of the various elements which make up the prosperity of our Common Schools. And if increased attention and knowledge have rendered their own views more practical and judicious, have quickened their interest, and imparted such alacrity to their exertions as nothing else could have done,—why, let them ask, should not the same means produce the same effect upon the minds of others, —especially upon the minds of parents and guardians, on whose coöperation, in the last resort, the success or failure of the whole institution depends ? How can the committees, for the current year, better perform their high and responsible duties than by spreading light and wisdom in the paths of their constituents ? How, more successfully, can they render all their other labors, at once so little burdensome and so vigorously effective ?

An examination of the reports and aggregates contained in the Abstract, will show that a grand advance was made, during the last, over the preceding year, in regard to all the principal elements which make up the prosperity of the schools.

The school terms were longer ; in many large schools, there was a separation of the scholars according to ages and attainments ; more female teachers were employed ; higher wages were given to both males and females ; and the attendance of the scholars, bad as it was, was decidedly better than heretofore. The appropriations of the towns, in the form of direct taxes for the support of the schools, exhibit a striking advance over those of any previous year, exceeding that of the last year almost *fourteen thousand dollars*. By mere chance,—yet a fortunate chance,—the last sentence in the body of the volume is one which ought to be so deeply impressed upon the minds of the people of this State as never to be obliterated. It is the closing remark of the report from the town of Nantucket,—a remark which that town not only proclaims with its lips, but exemplifies and illustrates by its deeds,—“LET THE KNIFE OF EXCISION BE STAYED WHEN IT WOULD SEVER THE APPROPRIATION FOR THE SUPPORT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.”

EXTRACTS FROM THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF A. H. EVERETT,
PRESIDENT OF JEFFERSON COLLEGE, (PARISH OF ST. JAMES,)
STATE OF LOUISIANA.

Of the two great duties that devolve upon communities in their social capacity, it is difficult to say whether education or government,—the management of the common concerns of the existing generation, or the preparation of the next to take its turn upon the theatre of active life,—be the more important. Both, at all events, are indispensable to the successful and permanent operation of any political system. Without the security and protection afforded to the individual by a good government, there can be no effectual attempt at general education. On the other hand, the best political institutions, if established by accident in regions not prepared for their reception by the previous diffusion of knowledge, decay, and dwindle into nothing, or, perhaps, instead of working out their natural results, become themselves the fatal sources of national distress and ruin. Thus the institutions of the United States, so productive with us in every element of public prosperity and individual happiness, when transplanted to the Spanish colonies, have brought forth, thus far, no better fruits than civil war and virtual anarchy, which, after lasting more than a quarter of a century, seem to be as far from any approach to an early conclusion as at first. What reason can be given for this difference, excepting that the Spanish colonies had not been prepared by a suitable course of discipline, to appreciate correctly the boon of independence and liberty, while the people of this country had been trained for nearly two centuries before the revolution, in town meetings and Common Schools? “The Common Schools of New England,” as was justly remarked on a public occasion by one of the distinguished literary ornaments of our country, “were the true patent of our pilgrim fathers for a free constitution of government.” Even France, illustrious as she was in arts and letters before the revolution, when she attempted to practise upon the political principles of the United States, felt the want of that general education of the people which formed the peculiarity of New England, where our revolution received its principal impulse. It was not until the happiness of one generation had been sacrificed in the struggle, and another, educated in the stern school of adversity, had come upon the field, that this great nation began to realize the fruits of its arduous efforts, and to enjoy the advantages of a liberal, wise, and well-administered government.

But the importance of education is a common truism which needs not here to be insisted on. More doubtful and difficult, but not less momentous, is the question how this great object is to be effected. Here, too, the general outline of the course to be pursued is sufficiently clear, and only needs to be well carried out in detail, and faithfully reduced to practice, in order to produce a satisfactory result. The apparatus required for a complete system of public education, consists of two parts; on the one hand, the Common Schools, which distribute among the body of the people, the elements of learning that may qualify them to discharge with intelligence the common duties of the individual and the citizen; on the other, the higher institutions, which, under the various names of Academies, Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools, prepare a smaller number for the exercise of the learned professions,

for independent literary labor, for the higher departments of political employment, and for the business of instruction.

It would be useless to argue the question, which of these two divisions of the apparatus, necessary for a complete system of public education, is the more important, since both are absolutely indispensable. That the mass of the people should have the means of obtaining, in Common Schools, the best education which circumstances may render possible, will hardly be denied in this country. The advantage of a state of general ignorance is a paradox, which finds no advocates here, and but few,—though it still does find a few,—in Europe. The necessity of the higher institutions, again, is not less apparent, were it only for the purpose of forming teachers for the lower. But, independently of this motive, the expediency of imparting to the comparatively smaller number of the citizens who are intended for professional, political, and literary pursuits, a higher education than can possibly be given to the whole, will never be contested in good faith by any competent judge.

As Common Schools and colleges, or other institutions of equivalent character, under whatever name, compose the natural elements of every complete system of public education, so they have generally subsisted together, in greater or less degrees of perfection, according to the degree of attention paid to education in general, and to the circumstances of each particular country. Common Schools were in use amongst the ancients, and are known to the Eastern nations of the present day. The method introduced by Dr. Bell, in England, as an improvement on that of Lancaster, was borrowed from the Hindoos, among whom Bell had resided. In Prussia, the Common School system has recently assumed a more complete organization than had ever been given to it before, or probably could be, under a government of more liberal character. The Northern States of this Union afford, however, on the whole, the most remarkable example of a well-established, long-continued, and, in the main, well-managed Common School system; and of the beneficial influence of such a system on the intelligence and morals of the community. In the Southern States, with the exception of some of the larger cities, the system can hardly be said to exist; nor could it easily be reconciled with their peculiar form of society. * * *

On this occasion, however, our attention is more naturally called to the higher class of institutions, to which this college belongs. Universities, or colleges, in the present popular acceptance of the terms,—that is, corporations chartered for the purpose of giving instruction on the higher branches of learning,—are peculiar to modern times. Among the Greeks, the higher education was conducted by individual teachers, each of whom collected round him a circle of students, to whom he gave instruction in the whole range of the arts and sciences. Universities and colleges began, very early in the history of modern Europe, to exercise an important influence; and, if the accounts we have of them can be depended on, attracted a much greater concourse of students than is ever witnessed at the present day. As early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the universities of Paris, Pavia, and Salamanca, then among the most conspicuous in Europe, are said to have been attended by more than ten thousand students at a time. Pavia and Salamanca have since very much fallen; but even Paris,

though it sustains its ancient reputation, and may, perhaps, be considered as standing at the head of the literary institutions of the old world, no longer draws together the same large attendance. Although the population of the city is now, at least, seven times as great as it was in the age of Abelard, the lectures of the celebrated contemporary in metaphysics, Victor Cousin, which yet enjoyed a popularity unexampled in any other recent instance, were heard by audiences of less than a thousand persons. The British universities of Oxford and Cambridge have, at most, on an average, two or three thousand names on their books; and the presence of a considerable number of the persons so inscribed is merely nominal. The most frequented German universities, though they are justly considered as among the very best of the present period, contain, on an average, but about a thousand students. This great diminution of the number of students at the principal universities of Europe, which seems, at first view, singularly at variance with the increase of population that has taken place in most countries, and the not less apparent increase in the general attention to learning and science, is probably owing to the more than proportional augmentation of the means and facilities of acquiring knowledge. In the middle ages, when manuscripts were scarce and libraries few, the prominent universities were almost the only sources to which the student could resort for instruction in the higher branches of knowledge. At the present day, the invention of printing has carried learning, in its most profound as well as most popular departments, to the door of every one who chooses to receive it; and those who send their children abroad in search of this precious acquisition, may generally find a supply in their immediate neighborhood, of substantially as good a quality as at the most ancient, expensive, and celebrated seats of instruction.

In this country, the establishment of institutions of the higher class dates from the foundation of the oldest colonies, and the progress of the country, in this respect, has fully kept pace with its advancement in the other elements of prosperity and greatness. Harvard College,—the most ancient, and from the value of its endowments and the extent of its apparatus, the most important of these institutions,—is coeval with the settlement of the colony of Massachusetts. It was dedicated originally to "Christ and the Church," and its immediate object, in the first instance, was to furnish the colony with a learned clergy. It has always, however, embraced within the sphere of its instruction the whole circle of the sciences, and has recently acquired additional distinction by the great success of its law school. The example of Massachusetts, in this particular, has been imitated successively by almost all the States. There is hardly one of them, except, perhaps, a few of the very youngest, which has not one or more college institutions, and many have several in a more or less flourishing state. Among the number may be mentioned, as particularly interesting, the university of Virginia, founded under the immediate direction of the illustrious philosopher and statesman, whose name has been adopted as the distinction of this college, and the university of New York, which, though it has not yet perhaps quite realized the views of its enlightened founders, will probably become, in time, an institution of a character rather more elevated than that of most of our colleges, and approach-

ing more nearly to the idea of a real university, as understood in Europe. The splendid legacies of Girard and Smithson, if judiciously appropriated, will establish two new seats of instruction, considerably superior, in extent and importance, to those which I have mentioned, or any other now existing in the Union. * * *

The forms of instruction and discipline, adopted in the different institutions of the higher class, at different times and places, have been exceedingly various. In the schools of the Greek philosophers, instruction was given in the form of a free conversation between the teacher and the students. It was probably owing to this circumstance that such of the latter, as undertook to record the information they had received, generally adopted the plan of dialogues, which we see so beautifully exemplified in the works of Plato, Xenophon, and Cicero. In the universities of the middle ages, the form employed was that of public addresses or lectures; and that practice is still adhered to on the continent of Europe and in Scotland. This method of imparting instruction has at no time been attempted with greater effect than by the three distinguished professors, Cousin, Villemain, and Guizot, who have recently given so much renown to the university of Paris, and by their success in this department opened for themselves an entrance to the highest places in the political administration of the kingdom. In the celebrated British universities of Oxford and Cambridge, instruction was anciently given, as on the continent, in the form of lectures; but it is said that, for many years past, this method has gone, in a great measure, into disuse, and that the students now depend very much for aid, in prosecuting their researches, upon private tutors procured by themselves. To this remark, however, if it be generally true, there are certainly some important exceptions. The Commentaries of Blackstone on the Laws of England were delivered originally as lectures on the Venerian professorship at Oxford. The valuable works of Bishop Lowth on Hebrew Poetry, and of Adam Smith on the Wealth of Nations, were produced originally in the same shape; and, within a few years, the lectures of Mr. Senior, and of Dr. Whateley, now archbishop of Dublin, have made some interesting additions to the stock of materials belonging to the science of political economy.

In this country, the form of lectures or public addresses has been comparatively little used; but, from the great popularity which it has recently acquired in our principal cities, it may be presumed that it will, at no distant period, be more extensively introduced into our institutions of learning. In this, and in most of the other colleges of the United States, as now managed, the student is taught, for the most part, through the medium of approved text-books, which are explained and commented on by the instructor.

“Nothing is more common, or more stupid, than to take the actual for the possible,—to believe that all which is, is all which can be;—first to laugh at every proposed deviation from practice as impossible, then, when it is carried into effect, to be astonished that it did not take place before.”

THE POWER OF EDUCATION.

All the ostensible countenance and exertion, in the cause of learning, whether by governments or associations, is on the side of virtue; while no man could dare to front the public eye, with a scheme of discipleship in the lessons, whether of fraud or profligacy. The clear tendency then is, to impress a right direction on the giant power of education; and when this is brought to bear, more systematically and generally than heretofore, on the pliant boyhood of the land,—we behold, in the operation of habit, a guaranty for the progressive conquest, and at length the ultimate and universal triumph of good over evil, in society. Our confidence in this result is greatly enhanced, when we witness the influence even of but one mind among the hundreds of any given neighborhood, if zealously and wisely directed to the object of moral and economical improvement. Let that most prolific of all philanthropy, then, be fully and fairly set on foot, which operates by means of education on the early germs of character, and we shall have the most effective of all agencies engaged, for the production of the likeliest of all results. The law of habit, when looked to in the manageable ductility of its outset, presents a mighty opening for the production of a new era in the moral history of mankind; and the same law of habit, when looked to in the maturity of its fixed and final establishment, encourages the expectation of a permanent as well as universal reign of virtue in the world. Even in the yet chaotic and rudimental state of the world, we can observe the powers and the likelihoods of such a consummation; and what gives an overbearing superiority to the chances on the side of virtue is, that parents, although the most sunken in depravity themselves, welcome the proposals, and receive with gratitude the services, of Christian or moral philanthropy in behalf of their families. However hopeless, then, a reformation, among those whose vicious habits have become inveterate, it is well that there should be so wide and unobstructed an access to those among whom the habits have yet to be formed. It is this which places education on such firm vantage ground, if not for reclaiming the degeneracy of individuals, yet for reclaiming, after the lapse of a few generations, the degeneracy of the species; and however abortive many of the schemes and enterprises in this highest walk of charity may hitherto have proved, yet the manifest and growing attention to the cause does open a brilliant moral perspective for the ages that are to come. The experience of what has been done locally, by a few zealous individuals, warrants our most cheering anticipations of what may yet be done universally,—when the powers of that simple but mighty instrument which they employ, if brought to bear on that most malleable of all subjects, the infancy of human existence, come to be understood, and put into busy operation over the whole length and breadth of the land. In the grievous defect of our national institutions, and the wretched abandonment of a people left to themselves, and who are permitted to live recklessly and at random, as they list,—we see enough to account for the profligacy of our crowded cities, and for the sad demoralization of our neglected provinces. But, on the other hand, we feel assured that, in an efficient system of wise and well-principled instruction, there are capabilities within our reach for a great and glorious revival. We might not

know the reason why, in the moral world, so many ages of darkness and depravity should have been permitted to pass by,—any more than we know the reason why, in the natural world, the trees of a forest, instead of starting all at once into the full efflorescence and stateliness of their manhood, have to make their slow and laborious advancement to maturity, cradled in storms, and alternately drooping or expanding with the vicissitudes of the seasons. But, though unable to scan all the cycles either of the moral or natural economy, yet may we recognize such influences at work, as, when multiplied and developed to the uttermost, are abundantly capable of regenerating the world. One of the likeliest of these influences is the power of education,—to the perfecting of which so many minds are earnestly directed, at this moment; and for the general acceptance of which in society, we have a guaranty, in the strongest affections and fondest wishes of the fathers and mothers of families.—*Dr. Chalmers.*

It was the great evil resulting from listening to scholars, respecting the transactions of the schoolroom, without ever visiting the school, which led to the saying "Tell no tales out of school." The true saying would have been, "Parents, visit the school."

FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

(Continued from page 256.)

SCHOOLHOUSES.

It is a subject for universal congratulation, that, when speaking of our schoolhouses, emotions of pleasure now begin to mingle with those of pain. Before the publication, in 1832, by the American Institute of Instruction, of two most valuable papers on this subject,—viz. Dr. Alcott's Prize Essay, and the Lecture of William J. Adams, Esq.,—there was not, to my knowledge, (and I have now been four times over the State, with this subject among the uppermost in my mind,) a single public schoolhouse in the Commonwealth, which, in its general construction, and especially in its interior arrangements, would now be considered even tolerably good. From that time to 1838 and '39, the erection of a schoolhouse became a fact of less rare occurrence; and in some of those which were built, a part of the improvements suggested in the excellent productions above referred to, were adopted. During the year now just passed, more schoolhouses have been erected than for ten years, previous to 1838; and not only is the number greater, but many of them are admirable models of schoolhouse architecture. The examples set by Boston, Chelsea, Charlestown, Lowell, Roxbury, Plymouth, Greenfield, are worthy of universal imitation.

The subject of schoolhouse architecture has been so extensively discussed, both in former reports, and now in the Abstracts, as to preclude the necessity of any detailed reference to it, at the present time. The close connection of the schoolhouse with the cheerfulness and health of children, with their symmetry of form and length of life; its

intimate relation to their habits of order, cleanliness, and punctuality ; its powerful influence on intellectual progress, on manners and temper, and through temper on conduct and character ; its prerogative of deciding the question, whether the school shall be a place of attraction or repulsion to the young, from the day of their earliest associations with it ; its power to further or to baffle all the plans of a good teacher ; and its being the pride or the opprobrium of the district where it stands ;—all these considerations have been so earnestly and loudly urged, that there can scarcely be an individual in the State whose ears they have not reached. There is not a town in the State, where some men cannot now be found who comprehend this subject in its great relations to the public good ; and to them must be committed the duty of arousing the public mind to an active sense of its importance. Academies and private schools, which are sustained by a few individuals, are, almost without exception, kept in comfortable, well-arranged, and attractive buildings. Why is it, that the whole public is so much less able than a part of it, to maintain decent and respectable places for education ? Why should private dwellings, churches, courthouses, markets, and even jails and prisons, be superior, in some of the most important desiderata of a residence, to the public schoolhouse ? Certainly, a foreigner, in travelling over our territory, would find a surer augury of the perpetuity or the downfall of our institutions, in the appearance of our schoolhouses, than in all else within the range of his observation. Forts, arsenals, garrisons, armies, navies, are means of security and defence, which were invented in half-civilized times and in feudal or despotic countries ; but schoolhouses are the republican line of fortifications, and if they are dismantled and dilapidated, ignorance and vice will pour in their legions through every breach.

Before leaving this subject, however, it is necessary to point out one evil which a little precaution will abundantly remedy. I refer to the bad repair of schoolhouses. A schoolhouse may be tolerable in its general construction and appearance, and yet be wretched and perilous, from wanting a few panes of glass in the windows, a hinge or panel for the door, plaster for the ceiling, a few feet of good stove pipe, or some similar reparation. It is a sad commentary on the character of the people, when a schoolhouse, surrounded by elegant mansions, is suffered to remain out of repair. A pane of glass will occasionally be broken, and the expedient of supplying its place, temporarily, with a hat or a coat, may be necessary ; but a wooden substitute, well fastened in, argues premeditated neglect. These mischiefs often arise, because the prudential committee, whose duty it is to put and to keep the schoolhouse in good condition, has no district funds in his hands for that purpose, and he dislikes to run the district into debt to any third person, or to assume the expense himself, and thereby become its creditor. The district neglects to levy a tax, because the amount immediately required may be but three or four dollars,—perhaps only as many shillings, and because the expenses of assessment and collection will exceed the sum needed ; and thus the evil continues, although each individual suffers more than the whole cost of the remedy. One district, last winter, had the sum of \$73 to expend for its winter school. A panel was gone from the schoolhouse door, which a few shillings would have replaced, but there were no funds ;

and the consequence was, that it cost \$23 out of the seventy-three for fuel, while the remaining fifty dollars were expended for wages and board. Such enormous wastefulness is probably without a parallel, but any condition of things which permits it, should be immediately changed. It ought to be universally understood, that the prudential committee of a district carries an unlimited credit with him, as well for repairing, as for providing a schoolhouse ;—nay, that he is liable to indictment, if he neglects, in the language of the law, to “provide a suitable place for the school.” But as it is always more agreeable to the agent to receive all requisite pecuniary means from his principal, the district ought always to keep a little money on hand, to be drawn upon, when necessary, by the prudential committee ; or it should pass a vote, authorizing him to borrow sums sufficient to meet all exigencies, and then grant an occasional tax for their payment. In most cases, a tax of forty, or even thirty dollars, would provide for all contingencies for some time. Being granted and certified, the tax might be assessed and collected with the town taxes. One grant, in half a dozen or more years, would probably be sufficient ; there would always be money on hand, and thus the mischiefs of delay, and the expense of separate levies for small sums, would both be avoided.

There is one other obstacle in the way of having a good school-house, which, indeed, but seldom exists ; but, when it does exist, it is a very serious one, and at present incapable of removal. It has happened several times within the last three years, that when a district very much needed a new house, and was ready to erect one, no site could be obtained for the purpose. The owner of a large farm, occupying the centre of the district, being opposed to the erection of a new house, either because he had no children to be benefited by the school, or could educate his own at a private one, or was averse to paying his share of the tax, has utterly refused to convey a piece of land for the house to stand on, or has demanded a price so exorbitant as to make a purchase by the district impossible. In these cases, I have been asked how it happens, that, when a private citizen or a corporation wishes to erect a mill for spinning cotton or wool, or sawing timber, or grinding corn or bark, or making nails ; or when land is wanted for a turnpike or a railroad ;—how it happens, that a man’s tillage land, his orchard, or his garden, may be taken, or even his house cut down or removed, and his whole farm appropriated ; but when a district wants but a single half-acre of land to be consecrated to the culture of the rising generation, it cannot be obtained. My answer has been, that in regard to the more material and corporeal interests of manufactures and thoroughfares, the Legislature has been importuned to act, and has provided by statute for a compulsory transfer of a man’s estate, at a price fixed by a third party ;—but that, in regard to the spiritual and moral interests of our youth, no such application to them has ever been made ; nor has any public opinion as yet existed, which would give to such an application a prospect of success.

(To be continued.)